

# what the water gave me

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but oh, my love, don't forget me

when i let the water take me.

Status: ongoing

Published: 2015-02-07

Words: 3059

Original source: <https://archiveofourown.org/works/3304493>

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# Chapter 1

The ocean.

It's pretty big, Ichirin thinks to herself. It's big and wide and vast and beautiful. And it holds all manners of creatures, near the surface, but also down in the depths below.

I wonder if this ship will sink like the Titanic, she thinks. I wonder if I'll be able to get away with Byakuren and Grandpa Unzan and everyone else?

Either way, she wouldn't mind dying in the ocean. After all, it's so very beautiful, with the sunlight sparkling on its cool, crystal waves. Of course, it would hurt. And she would be crying, if she did start to drown or freeze. But when she's all dead and gone, maybe she can wander around the ocean and admire it from below.

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They first meet when Ichirin fell asleep in the storage room.

When the monk wakes up and realizes *oh, goodness, where on Earth am I*, she reprimands herself for falling asleep in a storage room, of all places, and gets up to start looking around for the door. She remembers it's somewhere near a particular crate, but she can't see a thing in the darkness. It must be nighttime already, since most of the room was still partway visible when she had entered.

Then, a voice, "Do you have a ladle?"

Ichirin jolts - the voice seemed like it had come from behind her, but when she turns around, there's... there's a girl. No, not a girl, but... a boy? She can't tell in the dark, but the person looks neither male nor female. Androgynous? "S-Sorry?"

"Do you have a ladle?" They tilt their head slightly to the side, face blank. Ichirin fearfully notes the rather large anchor the person has

on their back, seemingly held up by just a single hand. How were they doing that...? "Do you have a ladle? Do you?"

"I-I'm sorry. No, I don't think so," Ichirin replies, carefully and cautiously, before remembering an old legend Grandpa Unzan used to tell her when she was a child. *A ship phantom, the ghost of a person who died at sea... they'd ask for a ladle, and then...* "N-No, wait! Actually, I think I do have one. Please just wait a moment."

The person doesn't respond, but then starts twirling the anchor they held around, somehow not managing to hit the floor or the ceiling, but smashing several crates and scattering their contents in the process. Seeing her chance, Ichirin takes a deep breath, mutters a quick sutra under her breath, and dives towards one of the items that had been in the box. The anchor swooshes above her, tearing a part of her robe, but she grabs the item and holds it up to the person's face.

"Here! A ladle."

They blink. "Oh. So you do have one."

"That's what I said." The monk bows her head towards the ship phantom. "Here. Please take it."

They do, taking it in their hand and brushing against Ichirin's finger momentarily. The monk draws back almost immediately, alarmed at the freezing touch, but the ship phantom barely notices, looking the ladle over carefully, almost scrutinizingly. Then they look at its bottom - there's a hole there, very small, but big enough to at least be noticeable. It's a warm brown color, with a few scratches from where their anchor had hit it. Ichirin fidgets in front of them, looking uncomfortable.

"Okay." The ship phantom nods. "You're safe."

Ichirin breathes out a heavy, relieved sigh. "Th... Thank you, miss ship phantom--"

"Don't call me *miss*," the ship phantom growls, sounding almost feral, and their face is in front of Ichirin's in a blink. "I'm not a girl. I'm a *captain* ."

"My apologies, captain ship phantom!" the monk squeaks, feeling rather faint in the head. *I think I need to lie down and forget this ever happened...* "I didn't... know, that is..." Goodness, she should have known better. After all, she had faced the same problem years ago with her parents...

The ship phantom glares at her for a little while longer, long enough for Ichirin to start breathing slower, until the glare settles back into an indifferent gaze as they draw away, ever carefully. "Okay."

"Okay." With great difficulty, Ichirin manages a smile, and the ship phantom suddenly flinches. "Is something wrong?"

"You're too *bright*," they say, and if Ichirin doesn't know better, she'd say the ship phantom had *whined* . "I can't handle it. My eyes hurt now."

*All I'd done was smile...* "Is that a compliment? Thank you... captain."

The ship phantom turns around, still holding the ladle and twirling her anchor around. Ichirin backs away from it as subtly as she can.

"Okay. I'm going."

That had been... rather frightening, but at least it's over now.

"Goodbye, captain ship phantom. Have... a nice day?"

Then they disappear, in the briefest of flashes. For a moment, Ichirin can identify short, ruffled black hair and a sailor's uniform - before she's left alone in the storage room once again.

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The second time is when it's late at night, and Ichirin is on the deck.

It's cold out, but she can barely notice it. She's still thinking about the ship phantom, how she'd never gotten their name, and how they had told her she's... bright. She still can't understand most of it, and why they had said so, but it makes her feel a little happy inside, and so she supposes the reason *why* isn't so important.

A wave of water splashes against the ship. Ichirin sighs, closing her eyes and starts softly murmuring sutras, content to be out here. Even if it is cold and freezing and she's very much alone...

"It's you."

... Well, perhaps not alone, anymore.

Ichirin's eyes snap open, the deadpan voice familiar to her ears. It had been a day or two since they had met, and now... yes. She could see the ship phantom clearly now. They were sitting on the railing, swinging their legs like a child. Dressed in a white sailor uniform, outlined with green, and short black hair that looked almost fluffy from a distance... they looked so much younger than how they acted. They were also dripping wet with saltwater, forming a puddle on the floor, but they didn't seem to notice or care at all. And, along with the anchor they carried, there was...

"C... Captain ship phantom? It's you again." Best to start with a polite greeting. Ichirin swallows nervously, slowly straightening to stand up from her chair. The ladle she had given the phantom is still clutched in their free hand.

They nod. "I couldn't sink this ship even if I wanted to. You gave me this ladle, after all." They swing it around, splashing water everywhere, but not even close enough to the amount of water Ichirin had heard over gossip and rumors. "It's kind of better than the one the other sailor gave me. Maybe I should make it my regular one."

Ichirin just nods, too scared to say anything else. *What if I make them angry again, and they'll go right ahead and sink the ship? That wouldn't be nice, not at all. Something polite... something polite...*

"Ah, I'm afraid I never got your name. Please call me Ichirin Kumoi." She bows lowly, trying not to make eye contact with the ship phantom again.

She straightens, just in time to meet their aloof, yet curious, gaze. "I've never had someone ask for my name before."

"W-Well... I'm different, then," Ichirin says. Had that been disrespectful? The wrong thing to say?

"Minamitsu Murasa," the ship phantom says, almost disinterestedly, "is my name. Though it probably won't be of use to you."

"And... why not?"

"We won't be meeting after this."

That had been rather blunt. She supposes it's true, though - a ship phantom wouldn't revisit a ship they wouldn't be able to sink. But then, why had they returned now? "Then, you being here..."

"I thought there was something unnaturally bright up here," Murasa mumbles. "Turns out it's just you. Should've expected it."

Ichirin pauses - they'd said it again. Bright. Is she really as bright as the phantom claims her to be? It's a nice compliment, and her other friends had told her she's a pleasant person, but this was coming from a ship phantom who she knew for about thirty minutes...

"Thank you?" She manages a polite, if nervous, smile.

Murasa blinks, then takes a step backward. They tip the ladle they hold upside-down, splashing some more water on the deck. "I'm gonna go."

Oh. Well, then. Is that red tinting the phantom's cheeks? Ichirin feels a smile creeping up her face - so Murasa really is still a little like a teen. "Goodbye, then, Captain Murasa. It was nice meeting you." The smile she gives comes a little easier, now, and it's much wider. Why is she feeling so at home with a *ship phantom*?

Murasa nods, their expression back to an apathetic one. Then they fall over backwards, on their spot atop the railing, and fall into the ocean.

After a beat or two, Ichirin rushes to peer down at the inky depths of the sea. She hadn't even heard a splash.

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The third, and final, time they meet, is when the ship has landed.

Ichirin stays behind a little, just so she can go up the deck once more, lean on the railing, and admire the sights the ocean has to give her. Even in the bustling docks of the city, she can still make out the twinkling stars in the night, and the waves on the ocean as they dance across the whistling breeze. A wind tickles her cheek, blows the wavy purple curls that had escaped from underneath her headdress, and the scent of saltwater calms her, if only by a little.

The ship phantom, she remembers. Captain Minamitsu Murasa. Their anchor and ladle and unwavering expression. How they had visited her, not once, but twice. And her supposed brightness.

If there's anything Ichirin can see in Murasa, it's their straightforward personality. It's almost endearing, though she knows that one wrong move and she'd probably be in the bottom of the ocean. Right. Do not underestimate ship phantoms. And their black hair really *does* look fluffy, fluffy enough that Ichirin would want to step right over and feel it through her fingers.

I feel like a necrophiliac, she thinks.



A splash of water. Surprised, she looks behind her, but she's the only one on the deck. Everyone else is in their cabins, fixing their belongings and chatting with acquaintances throughout the cruise. So then, there'd probably only be one person who would be able to be here, at this sort of time...

"Captain Murasa?"

Another *splash* - and the black-haired phantom is there once more, just next to Ichirin, sitting on the railing in their previous position. Their appearance had been so sudden that Ichirin hadn't even seen them come up from the water. Murasa nods then, their sailor cap bobbing slightly. "Kumoi."

"Call me Ichirin, please."

"Ichirin, then. I'm here again."

"That you are." The monk smiles, and Murasa, who had been staring at her face, looks away near immediately. "Is there something wrong?"

"I told you. You're too bright for me to handle." Murasa pauses, but then continues, in a lower tone. "Underwater, there's nothing for me to look at except the darkness. Three thousand and two hundred eighty feet below the ocean surface... that's where light no longer penetrates the water. It's also right where I live and float along. If there isn't a ship above me, then I can't go any higher."

"I-I... see." They'd just gone on like that... Ichirin hadn't even asked. Well, she isn't complaining. "Is it lonely down there?"

"Yes." Murasa turns to look back at the monk, sea-green eyes deep and dark, just like how they'd described the ocean. "This is the first time in a while I've been able to talk to someone that isn't an apology. It feels strange."

"Strange... is that bad?"

"No. Not really." Then the phantom sighs. "Kumoi... Ichirin. Can you get off the ship?"

"S... Sorry?"

"Get off the ship."

"Um... why?"

"So I can sink it."

"W-What?!" That had caught her off-guard. Then again, she *had* thought of the captain's bluntness as 'endearing'... perhaps that hadn't been quite the right thing to describe it as. Maybe something like 'unnatural', but not technically something bad. "But I thought..."

"I only said you alone were safe, right? The moment you get off this ship, it's mine to sink." They tilt their head to the side, twirling their ladle. Water splashes onto the deck once more. "If I were you, I'd get off right away. Don't bother trying to save your friends and family. Stay behind until the last passenger is out the ship? Bad move. I'll sink it right away, then, if you try to do that. The protection cast over you by my curse will only last for as long as I want it to. And I'd hate to drown the person who gave me such a nice ladle."

Ichirin trembles - she had been right. It had been a horrible move to try and befriend - even *interact* with - a ship phantom. "But, my... my grandfather, and Miss Byakuren..."

Murasa pauses, before peering closer into the monk's eyes. Ichirin takes a deep breath, before slowly letting it back out. Just as she's about to declare that she'd rather stay here than let innocent people die for her, the ship phantom says, "You have ten minutes."

Then the sailor falls backwards, and this time, they land with a splash. Ichirin stands there, motionless, for another few seconds, before she takes off in a dash towards her cabin room.

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The moment Ichirin stumbles out of the ship, pushing Nue in front of her, and lands on the docks, a great shuddering fills the ship. A roaring wave of water crashes onto the deck, spilling out of what looks like a tiny figure just above the ship, hovering steadily with an anchor on their back. Water seeps in everywhere; screams of the passengers too slow to arrive outside fill the air; and the great cruise ship finally sinks into the depths of the ocean, dragging drowning people along with it.

The monk pants heavily - it had taken her three minutes to convince most of her crew, four minutes to get them outside as fast as she could, which left her only three minutes to get the remaining passengers outside. She hadn't been fast enough.

"The ship phantom you speak of," Byakuren whispers, her voice light, and yet heavy at the same time somehow. Ichirin isn't sure how she manages it. "Minamitsu Murasa..."

"That was them," Ichirin says, with a sigh.

Somehow... the monk isn't sure what to think of the phantom anymore.

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Another ship, another wreck. You smile, lick your lips, savor the taste of saltwater on them. It's glorious.

The captain trembles before you, his eyes wide as he stammers a plead to let him live. It's almost laughable. In fact, you *do* laugh - cackle, more of, as you upturn your ladle and bring forth a wave of water that submerges the entire room with unbelievable speed. The captain lets out a strangled cry as he tries to swim and reach the surface, but no, there *is* no surface. He bubbles, makes incoherent noises, then drifts back down, motionless.

The seawater no longer invades your lungs as it used to when you were still new to the whole concept of being a phantom. In fact, now

that you're well accustomed to it, you all but welcome it - the feeling is exhilarating, much like how drowning others and sinking ships is basically your lifeblood.

You drift out of the cabin, giggling to yourself as you kick open the cabin door and let the water rush out eagerly. The water is your best, best, bestest friend - it's all you've ever wanted. How come you've never introduced yourself to the water properly before, when you were still alive? It seems like such a long time ago, now that you think about it.

On the deck, there's still one sailor left alive, crawling pathetically as he tries to hide away from you. What a fool!, you want to shout. What a fool to think that he can escape from me! You upturn your ladle once more, giggling and laughing as the water swirls around you almost protectively, curving and dancing and lashing everywhere. It's beautiful, but deadly. Just like you, you want to think.

The sailor's eyes widen, and his mouth opens. "Th-That ladle..."

"Oh?" You take a look at the weapon you've used to drown thousands of people over the years, with its warm brown color and the small opening at the bottom. There are still scratches on its handle, but you've long ago grown to love the etches on its wood. "Yes... this is my ladle. My beloved ladle." You slam your anchor on the ship, feeling it crack against the mighty item's weight. "My ladle... given to me by a guard..."

"G... G... Guard?" The sailor sputters. It's at this moment you've decided he's heard too much, as you narrow your eyes and your maniacal grin returns. He starts crawling away as fast as he can, too dim-witted to try to stand up. Granted, it wouldn't be very effective to try running on the slippery deck.

"Sorry. But we can be good friends down below, in the ocean I live in." You tilt your head, and with a flick of your wrist, send a raging storm straight at him. His mouth opens in a silent scream, before he is covered in the rage of the whirling typhoon. A wave of water roars

behind you, covering the entire ship with saltwater and pure, absolute, death.

You emerge from the wreckage, before slipping back down into the ocean's depths. You grip the ladle the strange, too-bright monk gave you so long ago tightly in your hand, then close your eyes.

You'll never see her brightness again. Somehow, you think, that will be fine. If ever there will be a next time, she will be on a ship again, and I will not be asking for a ladle.

(You do not want to be the one responsible for extinguishing her brightness.)